

Ref Code	Organisation Name
2022-11-YO51	Rochdale AFC Football in the Community Trust
Visit Date	Visited By
7 th March 2023	Victoria Southwell

Overall aim of the funding

To provide in depth, employment focused support to young people with experience of both the care and criminal justice systems in Rochdale.

Background to Organisation and governance

Rochdale AFC Football in the Community Trust (RFCT) was established 33 years ago and became a registered charity in 2007. It was originally set up via a grant from the Professional Footballers Association by a former Rochdale player who had retired early with injury. He started to take football sessions out into the community and over time this became a more established form of community development. RFCT now employs 21 staff.

The Community Director is supported by a board of 9 Trustees who are asked to commit a day a month to the charity. They bring to RFCT a wide range of skills and knowledge that includes business, inclusion, operational management, health systems, HR, criminal justice, youth work, safeguarding and education. Trustees meet every two months and three sub-committees meet in the in-between month. These are Risk and Audit, Safeguarding and Finance and each Trustee is linked to one of these.

RFCT has a strategy that runs from 2022-2025. This replaces a one year Build Back plan developed in 2021 which was focused on post Covid recovery. The current strategy sets out an ambition for growth, building on previous successes and upscaling them to ensure that RFCT is delivering across the whole borough of Rochdale, taking projects to where they are most needed. The strategy focuses in three key areas; sport, health & inclusion and education & employability and identifies key activities in each of these areas. The strategy is underpinned by an Operations Plan that outlines how the strategy will be delivered. Each area also has a Steering Group attached to it made up of staff, Trustees and project participants. Some project participants have also become Community Champions who engage the views and opinions of other people and then bring those voices from the wider community back to the Groups.

Leadership and expertise

At the assessment I met with Ryan Bradley (Community Director), Charlotte Griffiths (Health & Inclusion Lead) and Scott Webster (Employability Coordinator).

Ryan joined RFCT at the end of 2020 and came from a Business Development role at Burnley FC in the Community. Prior to that he had run Rochdale Rugby Club's Foundation. Ryan describes himself as ambitious and optimistic. He believes that the charity should think bigger than where they currently are but is also aware of the limitations that exist and understands the value of partnerships to strengthen what they do. He showed himself to be extremely inclusive and collaborative but also a clear and decisive leader.

Charlotte and Scott both have considerable expertise in health & inclusion and employability. Charlotte joined RFCT in 2001 to kickstart their health focus.

Aims and Activities

Rochdale AFC Football in the Community Trust's vision is to make Rochdale a better place to live, work and play. They do this through using the power of football and the brand of Rochdale AFC to raise aspirations and transform lives. Their values of passionate, impactful, honest, high quality and fair underpin all that they do.

RFCT runs projects under three key pillars.

- Community Sport – this includes coaching in schools, school holiday camps and women's football clubs. This area of work used to be their core offer.
- Health & Inclusion – runs projects that identifies local issues that need addressing such as health inequalities, community cohesion, and work that links with council inclusion priorities. Projects tend to be focused on marginalised groups such as veterans, older people and BAME communities.
- Education & Employability – provides alternative education provision and employability support for those who are work ready but lack job seeking skills and those who are furthest from employment. Also provides a Sports College Programme at Level 2 and Level 3.

Annually RFCT works with around 5,000-6,000 people and 92% will be between 5-25.

Safeguarding

RFCT has an accessible and comprehensive Safeguarding policy and a clear and extremely strong approach to implementing it. Rochdale AFC is required to meet strict safeguarding standards by the English Football League and the English Football Trust require similar standards of the Community Trust. The club is mandated to employ a part time Safeguarding Officer and the Trust contribute to the salary of this role to make it a full-time post who works across both entities. So, there is a strong focus on Safeguarding within RFCT that is led by a dedicated employee.

All new staff undertake three external mandatory safeguarding courses as part of their induction and coaches also have to undertake FA training. All staff also undertake annual EFL refresher training. The Community Director and the Head of Safeguarding are the named Safeguarding Leads on the policy and there is also a Trustee with responsibility for Safeguarding. RFCT is part of the Local Authority Framework for Safeguarding and liaise directly with the LADO to escalate concerns externally.

Day to day management of concerns is via an online system Tootoot, which all staff have access to and use to record any incidents. These are then reviewed by the Community Director, Safeguarding Trustee and Head of Safeguarding and a plan put in place to deal with them. Issues are also discussed at regular team meetings and all team meetings, where additional breakfast training takes place. During January and February 2023 there have been 13 safeguarding concerns recorded, but none were deemed serious enough to need to be escalated externally. Over the past 12 months one concern has been escalated to the LADO for their intervention.

Finances

Financial Statements for the year ending 31st December 2021 show income of £470,370 against expenditure of £469,888 resulting in a small surplus of £482. Net current assets amount to £159,255 and a reserve figure of £195,945 of which all is unrestricted. The reserves policy is quite vague and states that the charity should hold substantial sums in reserves in order to meet anticipated future expenditure. Currently reserves held amount to five months expenditure. In 2021 RFCT bought £25,000 of shares in the club, which appear in their unrestricted reserves. These were bought to ensure that the charity had a say in the running of the club should it be taken over.

Budgets and funding predictions for the two-year period of the grant show an ambitious increase in predicted income year on year. This growth matches the targets set out in the Operational Plan and links to an expansion of current services rather than new work. For the first year of the grant 68% of income has been confirmed and the rest is either commercial income that is likely to be realised or income that will be confirmed at the beginning of September once places on their alternative education provision have been filled. Main funding comes from Premier League Charitable Fund, English Football League Trust, Education and Skills Agency and Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council.

Strong financial systems are in place. Day to day management is undertaken by the Community Director supported by a Business Administrator. Monthly management accounts are produced that are reviewed by the Treasurer and detailed financial discussions take place at the Trustee Meetings and the Finance Sub Committee.

Current Situation and need

Analysis of local data, alongside having worked in partnership with the Youth Offending Team and Care Leaver Team in Rochdale, has enabled RAFC to shine a spot light on the high level of young offenders in Rochdale who also have experience of the care system. Many of these young people have experienced huge inequalities from very early in their lives and often have little stability or support within their home unit to assist them.

Through their previous work in local prisons and also through their alternative education programmes and care leaver support modules, RAFC have gained a good understanding of many of the challenges and issues facing young people in Rochdale. These include; lack of support, lack of trusted adults/role models, lack of confidence and self-esteem, poor communication skills, lack of routine and structure in their daily life, poor physical health, poor mental health and well-being and substance misuse issues. A key barrier that many young people with offending histories talk about is a lack of hope or expectation that they can get a decent job, and as such they don't commit to (or see the point in joining) many of the support programmes on offer. This huge gap in building aspiration levels in young offenders is a vital part of the jigsaw that needs addressing to enable them to ability to move forward and achieve positive outcomes and destinations.

Local businesses also need to be educated to the potential of these young people. Positive interactions between employers and young offenders can provide opportunities for stigma associated with offending to be broken down, leading to second chances being offered to the young people. And with multiple local sponsors and associated businesses in Rochdale, there are existing pathways into making links with local employers that can lead to paid employment.

RFCT plan to put in place a programme of in-depth support and training for 30 young offenders with experience of the care system which will break down the barriers that each individual faces and put in place personalised and holistic support. The support will be led by an Employability Mentor who will work to develop positive relationships of trust and respect with each individual, enabling a clear understanding of the challenges they face and the interests they have regarding future employment. The programme will provide a menu of activities that the young person can choose from to enable them to co-design their support programme and ensure that they are getting the right level of support that they need. This will involve regular access to sport and activity, work around improving mental health and developing effective coping strategies so as to develop better resilience.

The programme will also utilise the various micro-businesses that exist within RFCT and the football club to provide each young person with a range of work taster and placement opportunities in areas of interest to them. Alongside this, modules around communication skills and life skills will be delivered to help each young person to understand how they can better position themselves for success within the job market. The project will take place over a 12-week period and up to six months support will be offered to ensure that extra help and support is available at any crisis points or stages of vulnerability in the young person's onward journey in employment.

Expected Key Achievements in Year 1

EKA 1

Young offenders will develop increased resilience and improved mental health through gaining new coping skills and strategies.

EKA 2

Young offenders will show increased skill levels by achieving qualifications.

EKA 3

80% of participants will be in work or full-time education 6 months after completing the programme.

Request and Budget

RFCT is requesting **£60,000** over 2 years for the salary costs of a full time Learning Mentor and project costs.

£30,000 in year 1 - £25,000 (salary) and £5,000 (project running costs).

£30,000 in year 2 - £25,000 (salary) and £5,000 (project running costs).

Conclusion

Rochdale AFC Community Trust is a grass roots organisation that plays an important role in delivering vital services across the borough of Rochdale. The football club's badge and brand provide natural inroads into communities and helps to engage groups who have proved difficult to work with, especially young people. The work that they do across Rochdale clearly makes a difference and much of this is due to the direction that Ryan, the Community Director, is taking them in.

When Ryan took over the running of the Trust this clearly represented an intentional shift in the purpose and focus of the work that would be delivered, and the impact that could be achieved. Ryan recognised that being a smaller club in one of the lower leagues was an asset that could be used to galvanise the status of the club and its community work locally. Despite being a 15-minute train ride from central Manchester, Rochdale is very separate and the benefits of living next door to a major city aren't always felt. Therefore, the football club and the Community Trust are key sources of joy and support for many and the strong links to the community through initiatives such as a Community Food Pantry, keep it deeply connected and relevant.

The project that is being proposed comes out of recognising a gap in support for young offenders, particularly those who have experience of the care system. Currently RFCT engages with these young people through their other programmes, if they happen to be referred into one of them, but they do not have the resources to intentionally recruit them onto a project. This funding would allow them to do this and build on what they have achieved to date. This though has not been extensive and when I visited the organisation, I had a feeling that the project was rather more aspirational than it had been presented in the application. Funding would enable them to take this to the next stage but there is a lot of work that needs to take place to fully develop the links and the capacity of RFCT to successfully deliver this.

This though shouldn't be a reason not to offer support as the aspiration to develop this project is rooted in passion, optimism and a good understanding of the needs of the beneficiary group. The current employment focused work RFCT does delivers some really strong outcomes for people who have complex needs so there is definitely the expertise within the organisation and the right model being implemented. The link to the football club adds huge value to the project. Not only does the draw of being linked to football act as an incentive for many, but the high number of roles within a football club mean that there are numerous tangible opportunities for job exposure and experience. The club provides high numbers of beneficiaries with chances to work across all areas of the business, ranging from business admin, catering and ground management and some of these have developed into paid employment opportunities. Young people who join the proposed programme will also be given the opportunity, if appropriate, to gain some coaching qualifications and potentially join the RFCT team as coaches. This is expected to be an extremely powerful outcome of the project as those with lived experience of the issues that they support will become visible role models who are relatable and inspirational.

Rochdale AFC play in League Two of the English Football League. Their ground has a 10,000-supporter capacity and they are over shadowed by two Premier League giants in the next city. But the motto of RFCT is "to be Premier League off the field" and this was embodied by all the people that I met. I have no doubt that RFCT will develop a really good project for young offenders with experience of the care system and that for many of these the support they receive will lead to strong employment and education outcomes. There are multiple opportunities to develop partnerships and grow the reach of the project. A relationship with the Youth Justice Panel and Probation Service will provide immediate referrals and previous work with HMP Buckley Hall will be reinitiated to provide pre-release support that will continue through the gate.

This application differs from some as many of those are perhaps already more actively working in this space. The interesting thing about this application therefore will be seeing how the work develops and RFCT will be able to learn a lot from other grantees in the cohort. They will also have plenty to contribute through the unique way that they operate within the community. I have marked the risk to this grant amber as there are some unknowns due to the early stages of the work but taking everything into account, I would recommend supporting this application with a grant of £60,000 as requested.

Recommended Priority Rating		
Risk = Medium	Difference to organisation = High	Priority = High